

All the
Cool
Girls
Get Fired

All the Cool Girls Get Fired

**How to Let Go of Being Let Go
and Come Back on Top**

Laura Brown & Kristina O'Neill



GALLERY BOOKS

New York Amsterdam/Antwerp London
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Gallery Books

An Imprint of Simon & Schuster, LLC

1230 Avenue of the Americas

New York, NY 10020

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First Gallery Books hardcover edition October 2025

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INTERIOR DESIGN BY KARLA SCHWEER

JACKET DESIGN BY MAGNUS BERGER

Manufactured in the United States of America

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-1-6680-6745-1

ISBN 978-1-6682-1219-6 (Int Exp)

ISBN 978-1-6680-6747-5 (ebook)

*To all the girls, everywhere.
No one works harder than you.*

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Introduction

So, you got fired—laid off, let go, reduced, restructured, canned, shit-canned. Or if you want to spin it (and we don't suggest you do), you "left." Well, welcome to the party, baby!

The thing is, these days, you probably didn't get fired because you suck at your job. You likely got fired because your industry is changing, morphing, and mutating like one of those AI videos where people have weird hands. The changes are seismic: mind-melting tech advances, company buyouts, changing consumer demand—hey, maybe you just have a crappy boss who doesn't see your value or potential. Tech is laying off tens of thousands of people almost weekly, media is losing its currency, and startups

are hitting the wall. Every day there's a different news alert: IBM, Disney, Shell, Apple, Tesla, Mastercard, UPS, geez, even Dyson . . . the list goes on and on. And, of course, this year thousands of federal employees faced the buzz saw of layoffs wielded by the Trump administration's ostensible Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). There's no sugarcoating it: it sucks out there right now.

So many people are getting fired, from so many places, there is a TikTok trend of people filming and sharing their layoffs-by-Zoom. We live in a world where getting fired is part of the national discourse, yet few of us women can talk frankly about it, let alone own it. Why? Well, because for generations men have dominated the professional landscape. It has taken us ladies—culturally, politically, personally—so much longer to make our mark, to earn our position (while hard to believe, remember, we only earned the right to vote in 1920!). So, when you lose that extremely hard-earned status, it cuts deeper, because it took *so much longer* to achieve it.

That said, though, why should that define you? Why should you *let it*? Remember, you earned a lot of equity during your years grinding it out for your overlords, and you have earned the right to spend it. Everything you've learned, built, and put into practice over your career doesn't just go *poof* when your job goes away. Do not attach your value to where you work; your value lies within *you*. This transition is, in fact, a gateway to a whole new world of opportunity—to leave behind your old obligations and explore what you really love. (Read this in a Brené Brown voice if it helps. It's fine!)

Right this minute, though, you're probably on the couch—by turns pounding out replies to friends' and colleagues' texts, staring

at your bank balance permanently open in your browser, wondering what the eff COBRA is, and maybe popping a Xanax.

So, we're here to help. Our goal in writing this book is to acknowledge the shock, confusion, and all the stages of grief that come with losing a job, and pair all of that rough stuff with a pragmatic step-by-step road map to get through this time and emerge stronger. From coping mechanisms and self-care practices to networking strategies and reinvention techniques, *All the Cool Girls Get Fired* is a comprehensive GPS to navigate the path of career recovery and bounce back with more professional mojo than ever.

And while we've both been through it—learning many lessons rapidly during an overwhelming time—we called in the experts. When you are numb from the shock of job loss, we want you to simply open up to any page and learn from the best: how to manage your money, health care, legal representation (should you need it), your mental health, networking, recruiting, leaving a bad job . . . hell, even how and when to take a big ol' break from all of it. And because laws, regulations, and benefits are shifting all the time, we are sharing what you need to know now. Our experts run the gamut from financial columnists to workplace lawyers, health-care consultants to corporate recruiters. All of them, by the way, are super cool and explain things in English, not abbreviations and acronyms (lady, you're overwhelmed enough). This book contains so much of the information we wished we'd had when we got fired.

And speaking of getting fired, you know how you think at that moment that it's only happening to you? Well, it isn't. We talked to hugely successful—sometimes, hugely famous—women who, guess what, once got canned, too. And while many of these great ladies seem

to “have it all” (hello, Oprah), there were times when they decidedly didn’t. We were surprised by how emotional some became when discussing the subject with us, how clear and urgent their memories of losing their jobs were, even if the firing itself was decades ago. Like you, they were panicking about paying the rent or mortgage, had lost their confidence, and were deeply worried about their reputations. But they got up and got on with it, and sometimes fate intervened, helping them not just get back on their feet but to understand their value and want something better for themselves. Their stories are here to not just give you comfort, but to fire up your dreams.

But for now, focus on getting through the day, the week, the month, and onward. And while we know you can’t help it, *try* not to overthink all of it. A lot of the trauma of job loss comes from our own irrational decisions.

Once you’ve digested and owned your firing, you are better positioned to get your proverbial shit together. To put it simply: we don’t want working women to feel this vulnerable again.

Why Should You Listen to Us?

We’ve spent nearly thirty years in fashion media, an industry obsessed with appearance—surrounded by the slickest of ducks gliding along the pond, praying no one sees their legs paddling furiously underneath (or if they do, at least *notice the shoes, honey*).

And guess what? Both of us got big-time, super publicly fired; two ruffled ducks decanted unceremoniously out of the water. Plop . . . *et* plop.

But let's go back a bit: From a terrifyingly young age, all we both wanted to do when we grew up was to work at fashion magazines. Now both age fifty (well, technically, Kristina is still gripping tightly to forty-nine), we were teenagers in the early '90s when the world of style was at its shiniest: supermodels were prancing down the runway at Versace shows, the economy was rebounding ferociously from the late '80s crash, and *American Psycho*, well, that was *hilarious*. And maybe best of all, you could get drunk and fall down at a party without anybody filming it. (We both just sighed, audibly.)

The world was grappling with the start of the digital revolution, which was going to reshape our lives in ways we were just starting to understand, while the grunge movement and the rise of hip-hop were challenging the established (and vanilla) notions of fashion and beauty. MTV videos were like runway shows for us suburban kids. On the big screen at the mall, we were glued to cool indies like *Heathers* and *Reality Bites*—we would have watched Winona Ryder do her tax returns—and desperately wanted to be Uma Thurman in *Pulp Fiction* (minus the needle of adrenaline to the chest). We were surrounded and nourished by dreamlike images that built people up before, years later, social media started tearing them down.

As a teenager growing up in Australia, Laura was obsessed with those giant, shiny, phone book-sized magazines that magically landed from New York City like Willy Wonka's golden ticket. It was through magazines that she saw not just fashion, celebrity, and glamour, but another world that seemed—and literally was—so far away from where she grew up Down Under. As if everything was imagined, created, or just *happened* somewhere else first. In Australia, it felt like she was experiencing it secondhand.

The glossy images in those dreamy magazine pages became an engine, Laura's desire to be where it happens, the gas in the tank. In high school, and later at university, she hit the phones and wrote the letters (email was years away) to the key publications in Australia's tiny fashion industry. She started interning at any magazine that would have her—the first one was a Sydney style title called *Hero*. She spent most of her time photocopying and getting editors breakfast sandwiches, but, oh baby, she was *in*.

Meanwhile, among the humdrum of public-school life in Woodbridge, Virginia, Kristina's fascination with the fantasy of magazines like *Seventeen*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Vogue* soon found a real-world outlet in the form of her high school newspaper, *The Valkyrie* (her editorial Valhalla). It wasn't long before the newspaper was winning awards, and stories like her investigation into whether the school's Viking mascot was sexist propaganda (it was!) propelled her to the position of coeditor in chief. Every late night she spent tweaking layouts and headlines brought her one step closer to her glossy-page dreams.

Raised with parallel ambitions but geographically worlds apart, Laura and Kristina were bonded by another vital thing: both considered *Sex and the City* to be a seminal documentary.

Cut to 2001. We first met in New York City twenty-four years ago at the Marc Jacobs fashion show at Pier 54, the night before the world changed forever: September 10, 2001. Marc Jacobs was the hottest show in town (still is, actually) and Laura sneaked in with her one New York friend and social fairy godmother, Libby Callaway, who was the fashion editor at *The New York Post*. Laura had just moved to New York from Sydney—packing two suitcases, several pairs of impractical

shoes, and, for some reason, two decorative ceramic vases—six days before. She had saved up around \$5,000. Allowed to enter the country on a foreign journalist visa, and with approximately 1.5 industry contacts, Laura pinballed around the city, quickly learning how to hustle and who the players were (she almost keeled over when she saw the real Calvin Klein . . . in his own damn store!).

Kristina was more established, one year into her job as a fashion writer at *Harper's Bazaar*. She'd come to *Bazaar* after stints at *New York Magazine*, *Time Out New York* (her first real salaried job, at \$26,000 a year), and working as *Sex and the City* writer Candace Bushnell's assistant after cold-calling her in 1996 for an interview from a pay phone near her NYU dorm. Candace, the trailblazing journalist-about-town who documented the glitz, glam, and gritty realities of NYC dating life with her cult-read *New York Observer* column, was in the process of turning those escapades into the TV gold mine that would become HBO's *Sex and the City* (again, our documentary. Stop laughing).

Candace put Kristina to work, tasking her with important jobs like taking her iconic white Tom Ford Gucci dress with the hip cutout to the dry cleaner and transcribing notes she had jotted down the night before on cocktail napkins. All perfect training for fashion magazines, where Kristina, grateful to just be in the room, relished her sixth-row seat at fashion shows (who needs to see full bodies anyway?) and was now living in a whirlwind of creativity, chaos . . . and cosmos.

But back to Marc Jacobs: the pier where the show was held was dark, cavernous, and electric. Laura skittered around on Libby's coattails, wide-eyed, gripping a glass of champagne. There were

grapes and wine everywhere (*très* Dionysus), a pool filled with gardenias, a gaggle of supermodels in the wild, and, wait, is-that-Sarah-Jessica-Parker-over-there-holy-shit.

Kristina was sitting at one of the Grape Tables when Laura came by. Both were wearing black, Kristina with narrow, nerdy tortoiseshell glasses. “Ooh,” Laura thought, “a Thinker.” Kristina’s first impression of Laura was that she talked a lot, while Laura thought she was being judged (but, like, in a nice way?). Twenty-four years later, this has not changed.

Over the next two decades, just like those ducks on the pond, we paddled to the top of our industry. Laura’s first New York job was a heady six weeks at *Talk* magazine (working for Tina Brown and, *yeesh*, Harvey Weinstein) before it closed while she was on a shoot in LA with shirtless young actors being Photoshopped emerging from ostrich eggs (shout-out to Gabriel Macht from *Suits*; you had it then, and you have it now). She was then hired by *W* magazine—the archly fabulous, mildly bitchy go-to for fashion and society—in 2002, editing writers from the London and Paris bureaus. For some reason, she left for a crappy nine months at *Details*, then finally arrived as articles director at *Harper’s Bazaar*—where Kristina was still in residence and had been promoted to fashion features editor.

One of us wrote about dresses, the other about the gals who wore them—or as our indefatigable boss Glenda Bailey would say, “Hemlines and Headlines!”

We both stayed in that high fashion madhouse for years: *Bazaar* was a baptism by fire, whose flame never went out. Kristina rose to executive editor before leaving to become editor in chief

of *WSJ. Magazine* in 2012. Over the same period, Laura became executive editor, special projects (concepting shoots, writing stories, booking a zillion covers, and general celebrity whispering) until *InStyle* came calling in 2016.

We did it, damn it! We finally became editors in chief. Yes, that storied, very-weird-when-you-think-about-it title was a big prize. Well, bigger in the *past*. The mythical Town Car era of the '90s was never ours. Budgets got smaller and smaller, and all our going-out looks were either borrowed from designers or liberated from the clothing racks in the office “fashion closet.” But because we had hustler DNA, we drove it like we stole it.

Kristina’s discerning taste (she was *Quiet Luxury* before it was a thing), relationships, and business brain (she loves to probe a Euro fashion executive to get all *le thé*) put *WSJ. Magazine* into the fashion industry’s frontal lobe. She oversaw all editorial content and “brand extensions” (social media, events, conferences, newsletters, digital desk, and more), which made her News Corp. bosses lots of money.

Kristina loved it all, be it analyzing the texture of paper stock for the print edition or the analytics behind a viral digital piece, and unlike Laura, she did not get an instant headache from looking at an Excel spreadsheet. She also wore and sold a lot of navy three-ply cashmere sweaters.

And just like her sweaters, Kristina was comfy, ensconced in the soft weave of success and routine. She could have stayed in the luxurious folds of *WSJ. Magazine* forever, but in late 2022, just two floors above her, her boss was being replaced. And this would change everything.

Laura started at *InStyle*, a massive but benign Hollywood and fashion instructional mag, in the summer of 2016. She kicked the magazine in the ass—quite literally, launching the Badass Women platform in 2018. When women read *InStyle*, Laura wanted them to feel better about themselves: not worse, not lesser. (Her slogan for the brand: “Everybody’s In.”) Throughout her time there, Laura ushered *InStyle* vibrantly, and often exhaustedly, through a divisive political landscape, racial unrest, and two enervating years of COVID-19. And while she embraced celebrity and high fashion (her sweaters, FYI, were more sparkly than navy), she also operated from a place of warmth and community.

But by late 2021, magazines were in decline, being gobbled up, Pac-Man-like, by digital and social media. It was also starting to feel a little repetitive; everything revolved around survival, i.e., advertising. And while Laura certainly didn’t miss Covid, she missed the times when the work felt more urgent, more important: providing inspiration and levity to an isolated readership who sorely needed it.

When she was prepping an upcoming cover, she noted that the actress would have to wear Louis Vuitton (both the brand she was on contract with and the biggest money fish in fashion) and the whole machine was returning, once again, to obligation. She loathed what she called “tin cupping,” a ritual where you would bow and scrape for a fashion brand’s purse holders during the fashion shows in Europe. It was all so *démodé*.

Her mind had already wandered to other possibilities: starting a beauty company, exploring TV, or just striking out on her own. (She was also an early adopter of Instagram, where she had a strong

personal identity and a few hundred thousand followers—extremely helpful if you want to work for yourself.) So, one day she hopped on LegalZoom and registered her own company, LB Media, LLC. LegalZoom mailed her a pleather folder with her business registration stamped on it, and she popped it in a random drawer. She felt, for the first time in her career, that she had insurance.

And Then We Got Canned

LAURA: Cut to February 2022 and . . . womp womp. I got fired first. In late 2021, *InStyle* and its parent company, Meredith, was sold to Dotdash, a digital media company (and the magazine's third owner in five years). The Dotdash dudes settled in for three months, quoted Wu-Tang a lot, and, on one sunny day in early February, closed the print version of *InStyle* and laid off myself and our editorial staff over Zoom.

While I'd read the industry room (for months), it was still a shock. I went full Winston Churchill ("Fear is a reaction, courage is a decision" lite) with the team and spent the rest of the day lying on my bed with my sneakers still on, receiving hundreds of texts and DMs (unlike Churchill). I was so busy being a human auto-reply to concerned friends and colleagues that I didn't even start drinking. (Don't worry, I got to it.)

The official terminology in the Dotdash Meredith press release and following news pickup was "Laura Brown was terminated." (Sadly, I missed the new word du jour that refers to media firings: "defenestrated." It means being thrown out of a window. I originally thought it meant "disemboweled." Never too old to learn!)

For my termination, there were no killer robots, just a robotic HR representative telling me she was sending over some paperwork to sign—and when my health insurance would end (*fuuuuck*). I remember making some dumb, self-preserving jokes and wondering if I needed a lawyer. But who? I'd never needed a lawyer for anything!

Publicly, I said nothing apart from posting an Instagram Story of my hand holding a Sausage McMuffin (this was not my salmon and spinach era) and saying I'd get back to people when I could.

I went to that drawer and pulled out my LB Media folder. I knew I had a valuable currency in the industry as myself—not as *InStyle*. Most importantly, I knew I had enough LB juice to not just *be* myself, but work *for* myself, too. I'd been captive to the fickleness and self-made drama of publishing for almost three damn decades, and I never wanted a boss to be able to control my mood, my day, or my life ever again.

KRISTINA: Over a year later, in April 2023, I had a spidey sense that something was not right at the *WSJ* mother ship when I couldn't get an introductory meeting on the books with my new boss . . . for three months. The meeting was finally confirmed, set to take place in her office, but five minutes before, it was moved to the HR department. My fate was sealed: "I'm sorry we have to meet under these circumstances," she said. My ten-year run as editor in chief of *WSJ. Magazine* was over in ten minutes.

The boss said she'd follow my lead on the narrative around my leaving. "The narrative?" I replied, my voice sharp with disbelief. I wasn't embezzling money, for Christ's sake. I had zero

desire to spin some half-baked, PR-friendly version of events to save face. I'd given a decade of my life to this place, and I wasn't about to obscure the fact that this was their decision, not mine. (Why would I leave my dream job?) "You can tell everyone you fired me," I said with as much composure as I could muster. And so, the next day, she did.

Despite not having regained my wits, I still had the foresight to demand the company pay for a tequila-soaked bye-bye bash. Laura had jokes, but I had . . . vision.

LAURA: Kristina texted me, "Getting the boot. Call me when you're up." Now, Kristina is pragmatic to a fault, but she was in shock. I just tried to be helpful: I was further along on Fired Road, still alive, not broke, flashlight at the ready.

I called Kristina, and after we talked a lot about employment lawyers—we were in senior roles, had never been fired before, and were being pushed a ton of brain-melting paperwork—I launched into my trusty public service announcement, which I'd been rattling away for months to friends, colleagues, and reporters: "Your equity isn't attached to your job. It's *yours*. It doesn't go *poof* when your circumstances change." We both knew this implicitly, despite being rightly pissed that we'd lost our jobs.

KRISTINA: I've always been more of a "company girl." I enjoy structure, strategy, and all the grown-up things. (My favorite number is 401(k).) I thrive in that environment, finding energy and security in well-defined roles and goals. So, frankly, thank God Laura got fired first (our friends, laughing quite hard, con-

curred). She emerged from the experience resilient, unfazed, and just . . . happier. Her journey post-*InStyle* and the way she metabolized it showed me that there was life beyond setbacks.

When I wasn't alternately texting Laura and my lawyer about my severance package, I was carpet-bombing every corner of my professional network, setting up meeting after meeting. Determination + slight panic = motivation! Reading the room became my new superpower. I gauged the shifting dynamics and potential opportunities and asserted occasionally wobbly control amid the chaos. Every conversation, every connection, every idea exchanged provided me with a pathway forward. I also napped in my navy sweaters—a lot.

I wasn't entirely sure what I was looking for—it wasn't as though the handful of other magazines I might have wanted to edit were suddenly going to fall into my lap (Happy forty-second anniversary at Condé Nast, Anna Wintour!). I was open to something different, but I also felt like I needed someone to tap me on the shoulder and point me in the right direction.

I loved reading, I loved culture, I loved fashion, I loved telling stories—and, yes, I loved telling people what to do. But I loved the sheer craft of making magazines: it was like hand-painting frescoes in an age of Photoshop.

I've always thought of myself as an entrepreneurial person (despite only working for mega organizations). But I was always hustling and pushing to build something new. I didn't want to spend my days managing decline (i.e., traditional magazines that relied on ad revenue). I wanted to create, not maintain. So, whatever came next had to feel dynamic and full of possibility.

Later that month, Laura and Kristina met for a drink with a friend at the wildly upscale Centurion New York club (where people put down black American Express cards, not the green ones we both had to return along with our company badges). On the Uber ride there, Laura texted Kristina: “OK, here’s what we’re gonna do. We’re going to take an Insta picture together, look really cute, and caption it, ‘All the cool girls get fired.’”

We’d been up front with friends, colleagues, and the whole fashion industry that we’d been canned, so why not tell the world? We were great at what we did, and we got fired. So what? We didn’t realize, at the time, just how subversive that post would be.

(Here’s the pic below. Plus, look at all that wine above our credit limit!)



Getting Our Shit Together

People often say that getting fired is the best thing to happen to you, and while you might want to punch them in the face, they're kind of right. Guess what: when you look out from your career sandpit, wouldn't you know it, there's a whole beach! (You've likely been in that sandpit too long anyway, and a dog probably pooped in it.)

LAURA: As my husband, Brandon, is fond of telling me, I've been Johnny Appleseed throughout my career, guilelessly flinging seeds around in vaster and vaster fields. And I have to say, after doing a bit of a Fired Tour of Manhattan to give industry folks all the gossip right after being canned, I didn't really call anybody or pitch anybody—and thankfully, I had enough personal security (both mentally and, for a little while, financially) to not go full panic-pants. I was just about to get married, and my mom was unwell (thankfully better now), so I was like a dog with its head stuck out the car window, looking at the world racing by, wondering what would come my way. Rightly or wrongly, I've never been a read-the-instructions kinda girl.

While working for myself started out as rickety as an old roller coaster (see the following chapters on health care, money, and all the other post-firing terrors), and sometimes was slow going, it's been both freeing and thrilling. I own my own business now: fashion, film, nonprofit, TV, design, and advising startups where I might make Actual Real Money—

not to mention this book, which is somehow becoming a business.

An important thing to note: media is no longer linear, and its future is personality based. Just look at all the journalists leaving legacy media behind and starting Substacks, podcasts, and YouTube channels. Each of us is a magazine now, broadcasting our opinions, likes, dislikes, and trends on various platforms. *You* are the brand. I do some projects where I am “the talent” (with fashion brands or in TV development) and some as a consultant, like my work with the global HIV nonprofit (RED) and lifestyle startups. I’ve taken to calling myself the Lightbulb Lady, because all sorts of companies and brands come to me for ideas that, hopefully, will impact the culture. For better, not worse.

What is also *infinitely* better is being in control of where I am and when I’m available. (A walk in Central Park at 3 p.m. on a Tuesday? Why not? Just do a command performance on Zooms at either end.)

My husband and I don’t have kids, so I’m the first to acknowledge we have a lighter financial lift than so many others in that regard, but I am still the breadwinner of my household and I help my mom out in Australia, too. And while money still needs to come in (we live in New York City!), I realized my skill set can work in much broader industries than just fashion. And what do you know: it’s a helluva lot more interesting, opening the door to the big wide world.

Oh, and after over thirty years in the media, I know what I’m worth.

KRISTINA: They say that a girl's gotta have options, and boy, did I take that saying to heart. I refused to constrict myself to the narrow confines of defeat or self-pity. Instead, I embraced the uncertainty and channeled my nervous energy into exploring a multitude of possibilities, from consulting to in-house options at companies I'd covered as a journalist but hadn't spent two decades inside. The world was suddenly a vast playground of potential, and I was ready to embrace it.

And it's the same for *all* professional women; we just have to get out of our old habits, broaden our minds, and even take meetings with people whom, a month ago, we might have either brushed off or been too scared to ask. For me and my partner, Magnus, living in the Greatest City in the World means managing a never-ending list of expenses: rent, food, school tuitions for my kids, and those little luxuries, like Pilates, that, post-firing, suddenly seemed like massive indulgences. But even with blunt financial reality staring me in the face, I remained stubbornly optimistic. This was a chance to redefine what success looks like, broaden my professional landscape, and embrace the many opportunities that change inevitably brings. Of course, I wobbled occasionally—who doesn't?—but I kept my eyes on the horizon rather than my navel.

And then, almost six months to the day I left *WSJ* . . . I got hired. One of the first people who called me after I got the boot was Charles F. Stewart, the CEO of Sotheby's. I respected his vision (we had covered him and Sotheby's at *WSJ*) and knew him a little bit socially. Charlie was a fan of

what I had built at *WSJ* and asked me to consider coming to Sotheby's.

Like I said earlier, I'm a company girl. I'm not remotely built for freelance life, though I did flirt with the idea of setting up a consulting firm called Unsolicited Advice. My partner is a freelance creative director, and I couldn't picture the both of us navigating the gig grind—I just don't have the pitching-and-chasing (and invoicing!) chip in me.

The more I thought about it, though, the more intriguing Sotheby's became. The opportunity to set up a media division and relaunch *Sotheby's Magazine* was too good to pass up. Despite the challenges of the publishing industry, I'm not done making magazines. I also love working for a long-established institution (my most recent employers are 281, 135, and 158 years old). There's a certain magic in working within hallowed halls. And it makes me feel young. Our courtship continued, and I started at Sotheby's in January 2024.

Then We Wrote This Book

All the Cool Girls Get Fired (yes, named after that pivotal Instagram post) is less a how-to book and more of a guide to help you recognize and embrace your skills, your equity, and your worth. We will help you determine which next move is worthy of you and what you have to offer. Most importantly, this book is a mindset shift—a pragmatic, empowering, and humorous (hey, you gotta laugh) way to make lemonade from lemons.

We wrote this book for women at all stages of their careers because, let's face it, the corporate ladder was not originally designed with us in mind. It's inherently harder for women to get to the top, so when you fall—or are pushed—from your slippery rung, the landing is, you guessed it, *harder*. This challenge isn't just for those in high-powered positions; it's a reality faced by many women as they navigate industries that, given they were constructed by men, weren't made for us in the first place.

And you know how everyone refers to the fabled “C-Suite”? Well, a key reminder that the *C* comes from the word “chief.” And guess what: the first chiefs of industry were not women. These days, *C* is in CEO, CFO, COO, CTO, CMO, CIO . . . the business version of military rank. And all of those C's? They are still mostly men.

As of 2025, things have improved somewhat, but women are still in the vast minority. In their tenth annual “Women in the Workplace” study, Sheryl Sandberg's Lean In organization and McKinsey & Company reported that the number of women in the C-Suite had increased from 17 percent in 2015 to 29 percent in 2024. White women hold 22 percent of C-Suite roles, while women of color hold just 7 percent. (The report explains, “Women of color have experienced larger relative gains over the past several years. But given their significant underrepresentation to start, they still have a long way to go to reach parity with white women.”)

So, while there have been gains, here's the rub: the study revealed that the majority of those roles aren't that of CEO—aren't